

Unveiling the Triad's Struggles and Triumphs in MDL: Valuable Insights for Post-Pandemic Resiliency and Recovery Roadmap

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ABSTRACT

For every educator to continue serving quality education to every Filipino learner amidst pandemic, the Department of Education transitioned to Modular Distance Learning (MDL) through printed modules. However, as frontline of this major shift, new changes were experienced by triad' (teachers, parents, and learners). Using phenomenological approach, this study aimed to uncover those experiences and how they cope with problems met. Participants comprised of 24 randomly selected teachers, parents, and learners each from four (4) districts of Maasin City via multi-stage cluster sampling. Semi-structured interviews both online and offline methods with validated instrument were employed to collect data alongside ethical considerations. Results of thematic analysis derived six themes from the lens of teachers namely work stress, readiness, or adjustment, observed parental issues, time-management, delayed materials and communication problem. Likewise, parents' experiences extracted five themes namely disruption of work, difficulty in understanding the module, managing children's discipline, learning environment, and managing time. On learners' side, five major themes were generated such as difficulty to understand content, loaded modules and bulky tasks, limited interactions, poor basic Skills in literacy & numeracy, distractions that affect focus, and connectivity problems. Implications reflected major challenges that call for adaptive skills, innovative interventions, and policies to ensure both welfare and safety in the process. Despite difficulties, the triad initiated coping strategies. Likewise, factors affecting the quality and efficiency of MDL were drawn such as quality of material, process, learner's foundation, facilitators' welfare and capacity, communication, and home situations. This study concludes that the struggles and triumphs experienced resulting from the new transition in education brought the triad new work atmosphere and influenced the level of learning among learners. This provides valuable insights for potential interventions and policy recommendation for future post-pandemic resiliency and recovery roadmap for every school in the DepEd.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought forth a multitude of challenges, including poverty, unemployment, societal pressures, and disruptions in education. Educational institutions across the globe faced unprecedented difficulties. With the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases, DepEd has taken proactive measures to tackle the upcoming school year's unique demands. Despite the obstacles, DepEd remains resolute and eager to uphold the continuity of education. The decision to postpone the school opening is aimed at allowing ample time for necessary preparations for the upcoming academic year. The released school calendar includes strategies to address the prevailing public health emergency.

However, the government mandated educational institutions to suspend in-person classes until vaccines are distributed. As a result, the Department of Education (DepEd) conducted a survey to explore alternative methods for ensuring continuous learning. According to Folsom (2020), research demonstrates that high-quality education can be achieved through distance learning setups. Thus, Modular Distance Learning (MDL) has emerged as a prominent feature of the education system in the new normal. In an article by Malipot (2020) in the Manila Bulletin, it was mentioned that Briones, the head of DepEd, emphasized the significance of Self-learning modules as the primary learning tool, capable of accommodating all students and can be integrated with other available learning modalities.

The role of educators in the modern education landscape is crucial to effectively implement the new approach to learning. Teaching now encompasses a shift in instructional methods that demands significant time and patience from teachers. As we transition to remote learning, teachers are at the forefront, not only in creating educational materials but also in distributing and retrieving them, which comes with higher risks. Engaging with the community and constantly following up with learners present significant challenges due to the threats they face. Parents, too, are playing a much larger role in their children's education. Balancing the stressors of work, home life, and the ongoing global pandemic, parents are understandably feeling uncertain. Their active involvement in their children's education is essential for successful academic outcomes, but it's not without challenges. Many parents struggle to juggle their children's educational needs with their own work-from-home schedules amidst the crisis. For learners, the new educational modality presents new challenges in acquiring knowledge. It requires extra effort and hard work on their part. Home-learning can be even more stressful than traditional classrooms because the absence of peers and friends to socialize with makes it harder to manage. In this new approach, learners heavily rely on themselves and their "shadow" teachers to accomplish tasks, which can lead to difficulties and obstacles that may impact the quality and effectiveness of learning.

The triad of teachers, parents, and learners in Maasin City played a crucial role in the success of a learning modality. Therefore, it is essential to gather their feedback and insights from their first-hand experiences during the implementation process. This information will provide realistic, valuable, and practical guidance to school leaders for strengthening and improving learning continuity plans (LCPs). This study aims to examine the experiences of the triad directly involved in conducting MDL to extract valuable insights. The qualitative phenomenological analysis seeks to identify useful inputs that will enhance and streamline our processes, ensuring a systematic, data-driven, safe, and smooth-sailing school year. This study is also geared to uncover the lived experiences of teachers, parents, and learners in frontlining modular distance learning during this pandemic times. Specifically, this sought answers to the following questions, namely (1) What are the difficulties, problems, or issues experienced by the teachers, parents, and learners (triad) in frontlining modular distance learning? (2) What are the self-initiated strategies or practices performed by the triad to ensure quality modular distance learning? (3) What are some factors affecting the quality and efficiency of modular instruction based on the feedback of triad?

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study follows the hermeneutic phenomenological design (Woodruff, 2008; Lavery, 2003). To account for geographical variability among respondents in the four districts of Maasin City division, a multi-stage cluster sampling technique was employed. Cluster sampling involves grouping population elements into mutually exclusive clusters, as explained by Frey (2018). This method is utilized when it is challenging to create an exhaustive list of all elements in the target population (Crossman, 2019). The study randomly selected participants, including teachers, parents, and learners, from various schools in the four districts of Maasin City Division. Both elementary and secondary levels were equally represented, and multiple schools were grouped into clusters within each district. From these clusters, six teachers (three from elementary and three from secondary) were randomly chosen per district, resulting in a total of twenty-four teachers participating in the study. The same number of parents and learners associated with these teachers were also included in the sample. The selected sample size of twenty-four participants aligns with the ideal range of 5-25 participants recommended for phenomenological studies by Creswell (1998). This size is considered sufficient to achieve response saturation based on the principle proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

The research utilized both direct and indirect semi-structured interviews, employing a validated researcher-made guide as a tool. To enhance the findings, triangulation was employed, using artifacts and observations as additional support for the identified themes. Due to COVID19 restrictions, most interviews were conducted in written form. The survey questions were printed and attached to modules delivered to respondents, later collected for analysis. However, respondents without access to gadgets or the internet were an exception. For those with gadgets or internet access, responses were collected via text, Facebook, messenger, or email instead of written forms. To delve deeper into their thoughts and ensure sincerity, probing questions were asked through video calls. Participants were briefed beforehand about the research's nature and purpose. To ensure the safety of all involved, proper health protocols, such as wearing face masks and shields, disinfecting retrieved questionnaires, and maintaining social distancing, were strictly observed during data collection. For further follow-ups and online interviews, the researcher needed internet access. The collected data were organized, transcribed, and subjected to thematic analysis following the appropriate procedure.

RESULTS

Experiences of struggles through the Triad's Lenses

First-hand experiences of teachers, learners, and parents (triad) were captured in interviews to explore the issues and concerns they encountered while frontlining the implementation of modular distance learning in the Department of Education. The interviews aimed to understand how they dealt with these situations.

Table 1a. Experiences through the Lens of Teachers

Themes	Description	Sample Verbatim
Work Stress and Health Risks	Exhaustion of teachers from preparing, printing, sorting, and packaging self-learning materials with overlapping ancillary tasks and facilitating students. From stress, teachers face risk in health and possible exposure to viral transmission.	<i>"di lalim toa ka sa remote school na-assign ky aside pagkuha sa module, motravel paka, then mobaktas pa kas kabukiran,init. Nay time maka-encounter kag kalisod nga sometimes makadelay sa delivery. Exhausting kaayu but carry lang, hehe</i>

Readiness & Adjustment on modular process	Adjustment was not easy for teacher embracing new routines in workplace. The process is new while teachers do not have full grasp of the procedure in modular distance learning until they experience problems in implementing the modality.	<i>"pilmiro naglibog ko sani among bohaton sa MDL, dili pami sweto sa proseso. Tanan paagi bag-o lahi jod sauna, mao nga sa amo trabaho, maningkamot lage nga makaadjust para sa mga bata."</i>
Met Problems Observed by parents & learners	Other emerging problems are met relative to how parents deal the modular distance learning. Likewise, Some learners were found not working well with required learning tasks and their expected responsibilities.	<i>"sa ahong case nay mga ginikanan nako nga moingon nga naglisod sila sa pagtudlo kay lagi wala daw sila kahoman Naay oban nga pasagdan salaman ang bata kay unahon ang panginabuhì"</i>
Balancing Time	Webinars as well as other required reports of their designations are additional concerns of teachers. Thus, struggles come from balancing between routine works and ancillary tasks.	<i>"na busy gayod uie kay dili lang printing imo atimanon, naa puy mga virtual nga atenan, mga reports himuon, encode diri encode didtu, sahay maglabad na amo ulo labi nag di mi haniti parti ICT."</i>
Delay materials affecting distribution & retrieval	Delay of printed modules provided by SDO affects the timeliness of delivery. Distribution and retrieval issues such as tardiness of submission and presence of learners in difficult circumstances also add burden to teachers	<i>"usahay ang module akoo gihulat, dili moabot sa saktong schedule. Maong nay week nga wala koy SLM, naghatag na lang ko og LAS kay lisod man walay bohaton ang bata sayanf time"</i>
Communication problem	Teachers struggle with communicating parents and learners as not all of them has gadgets nor internet for contact purposes. The load expenses also entails teacher spending money from their own pocket	<i>"...tungod sa kalisod, kasagaran mga bata wala gyuy gadgets maong usahay lisod efollow up kay dili tanan makachat, usahay walay load ang ginkanan, makagasto ko."</i>

Teachers' feedback revealed that they are encountering significant challenges when it comes to implementing the MDL (presumably referring to a specific teaching methodology or approach). The primary issue that stands out is the stress and health risks associated with their day-to-day instructional tasks. Stressors emerge throughout various stages of module preparation. Some teachers have pointed out that managing large volumes of materials and dealing with printer malfunctions contribute to their workload and time constraints. As a result, many teachers find themselves multitasking, even when working from home, in an attempt to meet their targets. This demanding workload often results in mental stress and exhaustion, as teachers are not only focused on printing materials but also juggling other responsibilities both on-site and remotely.

Table 1b. Experiences through the Lens of Parents

Themes	Description	Sample Verbatim
Difficulty to Understand Content	Problem on understanding the content is experienced for learners who are reliant to the discussion of teachers. Learners find portions of module that are too difficulties at their level.	<i>Naglisod kay dili nako masabtan ang words ug mga explanation. Sa mga activity ko naglisod labi na sa English kay wala pa man ko nasinati."</i>
Loaded Modules and bulky tasks	Modules are tasky for learners dealing 8 subjects a week. Some modules are too long while learning tasks are demanding.	<i>"kapuya man daghana modules buhaton then nay oban dghan activities. Lisod sabton puros ra words, lahi ra og nay modiscuss kay masabtan pa."</i>
Limited Interactions	Since modules and learning activities are individualized, learners do not have opportunity to interact freely in groups to share and exchange ideas to enrich learning.	<i>"...lisod ning kahimtang nga ato ra kaugalingon saligan or kinsa sa ato balay kay dili ta kainteractsa oban lahi sauna nga nay group activities nga malingaw kaayu mi."</i>

Poor Basic Skills in Literacy & Numeracy	Basic reading and numeracy add difficulty in the comprehension of texts. Some learners struggle with lesson brought by poor basic prerequisite skills.	<i>“Naglisod kay hinay mobasa ug dili kaayo makasabot sa gibasa maong Dili tanan ako masabtan ang sulod sa module”</i>
Distractions that affect focus	The focus of learners is affected by the disturbance they get from working at home especially when the study space for learning at home is not conducive due to possible distractions such as noise, gadgets, etc.	<i>“nay panahon dili ko ka-focus sa balay kung adlawan kay alibugjaw, samok aho manghod, usahay kalit lang ko tawagon. Lisod sad og nay silingan nga banha kusog tukar music mao sahay muundang salaman ko og tuon.</i>
Connectivity Problems	Lack of gadget or no internet connectivity or signal to communicate with teachers for important matters. Unable to expand learning through research and watching video and exploring social media.	<i>“lisod kayo sa amo lugar sir kay walay signal, nagsalig rapod ko sa module kay wala ma koy celpon, wala mi kwarta ikapalit so dili ko kawork sa activity nga nagneed og research.</i>

It can be observed that learners encountered several challenges when attempting to grasp lessons in the absence of teachers, relying solely on printed materials. As the recipients of the school's efforts to sustain education through distance learning, they struggled to adapt to abrupt changes by independently engaging with learning materials at their own convenience. However, it is evident from the themes that the classroom experience differs significantly from the demands of the MDL (distance learning) modality. This approach requires their focus and hard work but introduces a substantial gap in effectively grasping concepts, which is not optimized without the guidance of teachers as in face-to-face instruction.

Table 2. The Triumphs of Triad vis-à-vis strategies to cope with the struggles

Teachers' Strategies	Parents' Interventions	Learners' Initiatives
Permitted Home Visitation	One-on-one tutorial	Seeking help
Group Chat	Referral	Read and reread technique
Audio-Video Lessons	Messenger with teacher	Time scheduling
Supplementary materials/ SIM	Prize-giving	Contact my teacher
Call & Text 24/7	Disciplinary measures	internet

Results of the interview and observations showed that the triads-initiated strategies to address the challenging situation they are grappling with. Teachers devise approaches to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Modular Distance Learning (MDL) for learners. Parents adopt methods to optimize their children's studies, ensuring that learning is engaging, enjoyable, and holistic amid the pandemic. They leverage technologies and various platforms to spark interest, encourage participation, and address concerns related to working with printed modules. These practices have proven to be productive and indispensable in maximizing the development of competencies targeted in schools.

DISCUSSIONS

Struggles of Teachers

Research by Alea et al. (2020) confirmed that teachers struggle to manage stress, especially during community quarantine periods when they have to juggle online follow-up with learners, meet school administrators' deadlines and requirements, establish communication networks with parents for support, assess students' output through online learning management systems, and create a positive online class environment by providing emotional support alongside content-based teaching and learning.

Teachers commonly faced challenges in adapting to the new education system, which lacked face-to-face interactions with students (Drane et al., 2020). This significant transition required major

adjustments and caused discomfort for teachers, as they encountered issues like time constraints, difficulties in providing direction, and handling cramming problems. Some teachers also had to address concerns raised by parents who struggled to facilitate the learning materials at home, especially when they were preoccupied with work responsibilities. This situation created less attention from working parents compared to those without such commitments. Additionally, there were learners who lacked parental support due to being from broken families or living without biological parents, further complicating the situation. In such cases, teachers needed external assistance to guide these learners academically at home, as they required extra support to meet the curriculum expectations during the pandemic era of education.

Furthermore, communication problems were common among teachers, making it challenging to effectively reach out to remote learners and track their progress. Limited access to gadgets posed a significant barrier for both teachers and students. Even when learners had access to cellphones, financial constraints for load or data connectivity hindered effective communication. Research by Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) demonstrated that teachers faced difficulties in communicating with parents, as some parents lacked the necessary gadgets and could not afford to buy load or data consistently.

Struggles of Parents

For parents, the disruption of their work due to these circumstances is particularly difficult, especially when their children struggle with the distance learning modules. The value of education to parents drives them to guide and facilitate their children's learning at home with the guidance of teachers. Parents often find themselves prioritizing survival before they can focus on thriving (Clark et al., 2020). This aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where basic needs must be met before higher-level needs can be addressed (Steere, 1988).

In the study conducted by Dong et al. (2020), it was found that many parents held negative views regarding the advantages of online learning. They preferred traditional learning methods due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, their children's struggle with self-regulation in online settings, and their own lack of time and expertise to effectively support online learning. Balancing responsibilities, learner motivation, accessibility, and achieving desired learning outcomes were some of the difficulties parents faced, as highlighted by Garbe et al. (2020). Trovela (2021) revealed that parents participating in the study understood Modular Distance Learning as a method where learners work on Modules, mainly consisting of written assignments, at home. Additionally, Agaton and Cueto (2021) confirmed that this new learning setup placed additional burdens on parents who were already busy with work and family responsibilities. Parents observed that learners faced challenges with the rapid pace of lessons, the overwhelming number of activities within a short timeframe, and difficulties in achieving learning objectives. Furthermore, parents had to cope with personal challenges such as stress, health issues, and limited social interactions with others.

Teaching their child proved to be a challenging task for certain parents due to the requirement of studying and understanding the module content before being able to help with their child's questions during distance learning (Agaton & Cueto, 2021). According to interviews with parents, some of them struggled to provide assistance when they lacked knowledge or comprehension of the module topics. As a result, they could only help with the parts they could understand and had to skip those that were beyond their grasp. The parents attributed their difficulty in elaborating on the module to their own limited familiarity with the subject matter. This suggests that parents' educational backgrounds play a significant role in their ability to effectively facilitate their children's learning. Some parents mentioned in interviews that they didn't complete elementary or high school levels themselves. Consequently, they felt their best option was to supervise their child's work on the module and ensure they were progressing, although they were not able to provide in-depth guidance. On the other hand, there were some parents who sought assistance from neighbors, relatives, or other learners who had a higher level of education.

Struggles of Learners

Several learners expressed their struggles in comprehending the module content. Some of them admitted to skipping certain parts and focusing only on what they felt capable of understanding. They mentioned that having a teacher present during discussions was crucial for them, as they were accustomed to learning by listening to teachers in the classroom. Relying solely on the module felt like a significant obstacle for some students. Trovela (2021) pointed out that even though studying from home could save costs for parents, learners reiterated that not everyone has the same level of intelligence, leading to difficulties in studying without a teacher's physical guidance.

Moreover, some learners faced challenges in contacting their teachers, especially when teachers utilized group chat platforms, as not all students had access to the necessary gadgets. This lack of immediate help proved problematic, particularly for students from remote areas. Additionally, students confessed that they often felt unmotivated to read bulky modules initially. They also complained that some activities were too complex and not suitable for their specific contexts. Uzurka and Makeri's (2020) findings supported this, as one student highlighted the overwhelming amount of tasks assigned by lecturers as a major challenge. The student believed that in-person classes were still preferable to the home setup due to the accumulation of tasks and assignments all at once.

The lockdown has allowed families to spend more time together and bond, but it has also presented challenges in terms of the new instructional setup, which has hindered socialization among children (Agaton & Cueto, 2021). During modular distance learning, certain activities that were possible in face-to-face settings, like cooperative learning, are no longer feasible during the pandemic. Lukong et al. (2020) highlight that students' learning greatly benefits from social interactions with peers and teachers, whether in-person or through online platforms. Unfortunately, the limited activities in the modules and the lack of access to gadgets for online learning prevent learners from developing their socialization and communication skills.

A significant issue with modular distance learning is that some learners still struggle with basic literacy and numeracy skills. The learning environment plays a crucial role in effective education, but distractions at home often interfere with studying the modules. Uzurka and Makeri (2020) found that 14.62% of students reported their home environment was not conducive to learning, while 12.31% faced challenges due to uncooperative behavior from lecturers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, connectivity problems, especially in areas with geographical variations, hinder the learning process as not all cluster barangays have access to communication networks. Consequently, some learners lack enjoyment and access to internet resources. Moakofhi et al. (2017) identified a lack of appropriate computer skills as another challenge that impedes the effective implementation of e-learning.

Triumphs of the Triads in Implementing MDL

During interviews, the majority of teachers disclosed that they conduct home visitations with proper consent and adherence to IATF health protocols. During these visits, teachers communicate with parents about their child's academic progress and inquire about any challenges or issues encountered while performing modular tasks. Additionally, teachers have found group chats using messenger platforms to be highly advantageous. This method allows them to send important instructions, clarifications, reminders, and urgent information directly to learners who are part of the group chat. To enhance remote learning, teachers have developed Audio-video lessons (AVL) on complex topics within their subject areas. However, some AVLs might not have undergone quality assurance due to time constraints and conflicting schedules of expert validators for the videos. Furthermore, teachers have supplied learners with supplementary materials, like additional Learning Activity Sheets, work sheets, and strategic intervention materials (SIM), all aligned with the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELC). Another measure taken by teachers is to create a master list of contact numbers and information for all the learners under their care. This allows learners to seek academic assistance from their teachers through

calls or texts at any time. Unfortunately, not all learners have cellphones or stable signals, so only those who can be reached through these methods are accommodated by these interventions.

On Parents' Interventions, the primary findings from them indicated that they often engage in one-on-one tutoring sessions with their children. This is particularly true for non-employed parents who have the luxury of spending ample time with their kids at home. On the other hand, working parents have less time to spare for their children compared to non-working parents. As a result, they resort to seeking help from others when they are unable to attend to their children's needs. Some parents turn to older siblings ("Kuya" and "Ate") or collaborate with their child's classmates who can assist with the school modules. Those with access to technology and the internet tend to seek aid through platforms like Facebook Messenger, where they may have group chats with teachers for assistance. To motivate their children, some parents offer incentives or rewards upon completing their modules. These rewards can be both intrinsic and extrinsic, as they believe that this boosts their child's confidence and attention towards their studies. Additionally, parents find that implementing disciplinary measures helps ensure that their children consistently fulfill their academic responsibilities.

In home learning, parents are typically the go-to source for help. However, not all parents may be equipped to teach the content, theoretical concepts, or provide explanations effectively. Thus, some learners resort to repeatedly reading the study materials, especially when examples are available, to grasp the ideas better. Additionally, managing time effectively is crucial for successful learning, but some learners struggle when overwhelmed with numerous modules, leading to last-minute cramming. Other strategies employed by learners include utilizing communication platforms and internet connectivity. Nevertheless, this approach is only feasible for those with access to cell phones, stable signals, and internet connections. Moreover, using the internet comes with the burden of expenses for data, which may not always be affordable for all learners.

CONCLUSIONS

The valuable insights gained from the triad's experiences highlight the importance of nurturing relationships with students and parents to better understand their current challenges. To promote student success, it is crucial to create interactive, flexible, and supportive learning environments that enhance social presence. However, teachers also need continuous support to effectively implement these approaches. To address accessibility issues, districts should devise strategies to assist learners with special needs, ensure technology access, provide support for learning tasks, and aid in resource navigation. Additionally, it is essential to extend the right kind of support to parents who may struggle with their daily lives while trying to support their children. Validating their feelings and acknowledging their efforts is crucial for maintaining their mental and emotional well-being and enabling effective support for their children's education.

Learning from the challenges and triumphs of the triads can offer valuable inputs and ideas for building resilience and recovery approaches in a post-pandemic situation or any future pandemic. Utilizing firsthand experiences from teachers, parents, and learners during the COVID-19 education can help shape new policies and roadmaps to address learning losses. The issues and concerns faced by the triad provide valuable lessons that can guide educators and policymakers in taking steps and restructuring strategies to make education effective, regardless of the crisis that may occur in the country. By reflecting on these experiences, we can create a more robust and adaptable education system that can withstand and overcome future challenges.

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